



Update from Congressman NEIL ABERCROMBIE

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Congressman Neil Abercrombie welcomes witnesses at the Forum for Filipino Veterans, sponsored by Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus on Dec. 7, 2005.



Filipino Veterans listen to remarks by Congressman Abercrombie and Honda

Dear Friend:

Abercrombie calls for equal benefits for Filipino vets

World War II Filipino veterans deserve equal treatment with their American counterparts. That's why I'm sponsoring legislation to restore full VA benefits to this dwindling group of soldiers who served the cause of freedom.

Last month, I participated in a Filipino Veterans Forum in Washington DC. Other members of Congress and I heard testimony from Filipino veterans and others working for full equality. The event renewed our determination to push for full recognition of their contributions during some of the darkest days of World War II. We were reminded of how these brave soldiers fought shoulder to shoulder with their American comrades in arms, suffered the same hardships, and sacrificed in the same cause. When America needed their help, they answered the call.

During World War II the United States acknowledged its responsibility for full benefits for Filipino veterans, but their equal status was rescinded by the Rescission Act of 1946. Simple justice demands that we recognize their equal contributions with equal veteran's benefits. We have made important gains in recent years, but we still have a long way to go before achieving full equity.

I am a long-time champion for Filipino veterans and have sponsored many bills to achieve that goal. The most recent bill is the bipartisan Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2006 (also known as H.R. 4574). This legislation would extend to Filipino veterans full equality with their U.S. counterparts in respect to the entire range of VA benefits.



Congressman Neil Abercrombie speaks with a Filipino Veteran.



Congressman Neil Abercrombie and Congressman Mike Honda hear testimony during the Forum on Filipino Vets.

A 2001 Department of Veterans Affairs Study estimated the total number of Filipino veterans at about 60,000, with approximately 14,000 living in the United States. Most of the veterans are in their late seventies or eighties, and the study estimates that the total Filipino veteran population will number about 20,000 in 2010.

In 2003, I joined other advocates to secure the passage of two bills to broaden their eligibility for health care and higher benefit payments:

1) The Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 increased VA benefit payments to U.S.-resident Filipino veterans and their survivors to the same levels as those paid to U.S. veterans and survivors. It also made New Philippine Scouts eligible for burial in U.S. national cemeteries. Previously, benefit payments for Filipino veterans and their survivors were only half the amounts paid to U.S. veterans and survivors.

2) The Veterans Health Care Authorities Extension and Improvement Act of 2003 removed significant restrictions on VA health care eligibility by authorizing VA medical services for U.S.-resident veterans of the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines and New Philippine Scouts on the same basis as veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. Under previous law, both groups of veterans were eligible for VA medical services only if they were disabled and received VA payments. In addition, New Philippine Scouts could receive care only for service-connected disabilities. Previous law did not place these same restrictions on U.S. Armed Forces veterans.

These laws are important steps in the right direction, but I will not be satisfied until Filipino veterans are treated equally in every respect. You can be sure that I will continue the effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil Abercrombie".

Neil Abercrombie
Member of Congress

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**Veterans Legislation Cosponsored by
Congressman Neil Abercrombie in the 109th**

Congress (2005-06)

HR 515 – Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act, a bill that would increase and protect VA healthcare funding by guaranteeing funding levels based on the size of the Veteran population rather than leaving funding at the complete discretion of the President and Congress.

HR 4025 – Disabled Veterans Fairness Act, a bill that increases travel reimbursements to Veterans for travel to VA facilities to receive medical treatment.

HR 2962 – The Atomic Veterans Relief Act, a bill that makes it easier for veterans that participated in nuclear testing to receive healthcare from the VA for their radiation-related medical conditions.

HR 531 – State Veterans Cemetery Fairness Act, a bill that increases burial plot allowance for all Veterans.

HR 2074 – Service Members’ Enhanced Transition Services Act, a bill that expands the size and duration of transition services to members of the military who are leaving active duty and moving into the VA healthcare system.

Congressman Neil Abercrombie

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